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ABSTRACT

The Pennsylvania German (PG) linguistic situation offers a unique insight into the mechanisms of language change, and specifically of syntactic change. Pennsylvania German consists of two primary varieties, (Plain (PPG) and Nonplain (NPG), a distinction based on the Anabaptist socioreligious affiliations of the former group that has produced two discrete sociolinguistic configurations. This configurational difference has linguistic consequences evident in the contact of both varieties with English. The PPG and NPG communities also differ in the degree to which English is functionally dominant over PG. In general, the PPG community shows stable bilingualism and language maintenance, while the NPG community is characterized by unstable bilingualism and language death. Three processes control the evolution of PPG away from NPG: preservation, convergence (change toward English), and innovation (change away from both NPG and English). These processes are evident in syntactic phenomena. (Author/MSE)

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Abstract: **Stable Bilingualism and Language Change in Plain Pennsylvania German**

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presented at the 1987 Annual Meeting of the Linguistic Society of America, San Francisco, CA, December 28, 1987

The Pennsylvania German linguistic situation offers a unique insight into mechanisms of language change, specifically, syntactic change. Pennsylvania German (PG) consists today of two primary varieties, Plain (PPG) and Nonplain (NPG), a distinction based on the Anabaptist socio-religious affiliations of the former group, which has produced two discrete sociolinguistic configurations. This configurational difference between the two communities has linguistic consequences evident in the contact of both PG varieties with English. The PPG and NPG communities also differ in the degree to which English is functionally dominant over PG. In general, the PPG community shows stable bilingualism and language maintenance, while the NPG community is characterized by unstable bilingualism and language death. In this paper I will focus on processes in the evolution of PPG away from NPG, which are threefold: 1. **preservation**, 2. **convergence** (change towards English) and 3. **innovation** (change away from both NPG and English). I will then turn to specific examples in the area of syntax.

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Stable Bilingualism and Language Change in Plain Pennsylvania German

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LSA Annual Meeting, San Francisco
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Introduction

Most studies of Pennsylvania German have treated it as a uniform dialect and have often avoided the question of variation within the dialect. Regarding PG as a homogeneous linguistic system is not wholly without justification in that, throughout PG-speaking areas, mutual intelligibility has, for example, long been present and differences have been relatively minor. Variation has, however, always been present and has undergone a development from being primarily geographic to primarily social. That is, 40-50 years ago and earlier, PG varied according to the region in which it was spoken, whereas today, it varies more strikingly according to speaker affiliation with differing social groups. Regional differences, which are still evident, are now overshadowed by a single sociolinguistic distinction, that of membership in conservative Anabaptist sects. Those speakers who are Anabaptist sectarians (Old Order Amish, Old Order Mennonite) I refer to as *plain*; those who are not, *nonplain*. This social dichotomy is giving rise to the evolution of two distinct varieties of PG that I call **Plain Pennsylvania German** (PPG) and **Nonplain Pennsylvania German** (NPG). Studies of PG verbal behavior have been focused on both plain and nonplain communities, yet most often independently of one another, and only recently have data been presented illustrating the increasing divergence of PPG and NPG from one another. What is becoming evident is that in the contact

situation between PG and American English (AE), PPG and NPG are affected differently. PPG appears to be changing at a more rapid rate than NPG, which is significantly more conservative. In this paper I will focus on an area where change in PPG is most evident and least examined, namely syntax.

Sociolinguistic Differences Between Plain and Nonplain PG Society

It has been noted that the primary difference between the two PG-speaking groups is one of language maintenance versus language death. Within the nonplain community there is an overall shift from PG/English-bilingualism to English-monolingualism; that is, PG is undergoing language death. The youngest fluent speakers of NPG are approximately 40-50 years of age and there is a continuum generationally which parallels relative fluency in PG and English. In the plain community, on the other hand, PG is being maintained side by side with English and there is no community shift to English-monolingualism. This plain/nonplain difference can be described within the framework of stable bilingualism, figure 1 on your handout.

I describe a bilingual community as stable on the basis of three criteria: acquisition, prestige and domain. First, acquisition of L1 and L2 must be complete and during early childhood for all community members. This produces a parity in the linguistic dominance (cf. Van Coetsem forthcoming) of L1 and L2, or equal oral fluency. Second, neither L1 nor L2 should be considered more prestigious or aesthetically 'better' than the other. This produces a parity in the social dominance of L1 and L2. Finally, there must

exist well-defined domains for both L1 and L2 such that there is a functional need for both.

Within the plain community all three criteria are fulfilled: acquisition of PG and English occurs early in childhood, both languages enjoy equal prestige and usage of one language or the other is motivated almost exclusively by appropriateness and functional need, not choice. The nonplain community, on the other hand, is an unstable bilingual community in that, community-wide, none of the three criteria are fulfilled. Speakers are usually linguistically dominant in their PG and display a wide range of values as to the necessity and usefulness of PG. Well-defined domains for PG have all but disappeared and are replaced by English.

Stable Bilingualism and Syntactic Change

This difference in the bilingual stability of the plain and nonplain communities is evident, as mentioned above, in the rapid syntactic change of PPG away from NPG. Syntactic change in a stable bilingual community simialr to the PPG/English contact situation has been described by Nadkarni (1975) and it is on this article that I base my analysis on the direction of syntactic change given in figure 2. In the plain community, despite the stable bilingual relationship between PPG and English, English enjoys what Nadkarni terms functional dominance over PPG. Functional dominance is a notion based on the nature of the well-defined domains of English. English is formally acquired, written as well as spoken and is the language of the majority, monolingual society, while PPG is informally acquired, spoken only and peculiar to the minority, stable bilingual community. Given a

tendency to reduce the 'psychological load' in the mind of the bilingual, syntactic phenomena of PPG and English show a tendency to converge. The direction of change is determined by the functional dominance of English. Syntactic innovations in PPG due to English influence occur unnoticed in the plain community and spread easily, whereas any imposition of PPG syntax on English is immediately obvious and checked. Conversely, change (convergence) in the nonplain community is hindered by the linguistic dominance of NPG, which resists pressure from the functionally dominant English, though convergence does occur, albeit to a lesser degree than in PPG. Let us now consider specific syntactic phenomena from PPG that illustrate its rapid change away from NPG.

PPG Syntactic Phenomena

Syntactic change in PPG under the influence of English versus preservation despite that influence can be portrayed as a three-phase process as figure 3. Original input from German dialects which remains unchanged indicates preservation. This input can then converge with input from English and either remain at this stage or progress further and innovate away from both German and English input. Finally, innovation can occur independently of influence from English. Just which areas of syntax preservation, convergence and innovation affect in PPG (and NPG) may not be as initially 'random' as Nadkarni has suggested. There are probably relative degrees of stability with respect to change in syntax similar to those in phonology. The question of which syntactic phenomena are more stable than others in contact situations remains to be explored, yet we can offer examples from

PPG of all three types of syntactic phenomena, preservation, convergence and innovation.

Preservation

What appears to exhibit the greatest preservation in PPG is word order patterns. Though scholars have felt that word order patterns from English are apparent in PG, this, upon closer examination, is not the case at all. As other Continental WGmc languages, (P)PG remains basically S-O-V and exhibits so-called Verb Second Phenomena, unlike English, which is S-V-O and exhibits far fewer V2 phenomena. The only changes in PPG word order result from the generalization of native rules and patterns apart from any influence from English and thus would represent direct innovation in figure 3.

Convergence and Innovation

The system of tense in PPG nicely illustrates both processes of convergence and innovation under influence from English. In figure 4 I indicate how PPG tense has evolved from Common PG, an earlier stage of PG common to all sub-dialects and preserved in modern NPG. What we observe in PPG is that tense functions are converging with English. Whereas the simple present tense in Common PG (line A) originally expressed English present, present progressive and future (lines A, B and C), PPG has developed two additional forms of frequency comparable to English. We find this same convergence of tense functions in the past tense (lines D and E) where English present

perfect and simple past are matched by Plain PG forms, unlike Common PG, which had only a single form. Convergence of PPG and English tense functions sets in motion the need for forms to perform these functions and this is achieved in two ways: First, through expansion of native forms, and Second, through innovation of new forms. Examples of expansion are the progressive form in line B, as well as the shift of the past perfect in line F to perform the simple past function of line E. Innovation is apparent in line C in the development of the future auxiliary 'zelle' derived from 'zeele' (meaning 'to count on'). Innovation is also obvious in the so-called 'double past perfect' form in line II G, a variant of the normal past perfect.

We see, therefore, evidence for all three types of syntactic phenomena in PPG: preservation, convergence and innovation. The unique relationship of PPG and English with one another in stable bilingualism, combined with the functional dominance of English is setting in motion the rapid linguistic divergence of the plain and nonplain communities from one another. As more data are presented it will be interesting to examine the relative resistance of syntactic phenomena to contact-induced change in PPG, which can, in turn, shed light on both internally and externally-induced syntactic change in general.

Stable Bilingualism and Language Change in Plain Pennsylvania German

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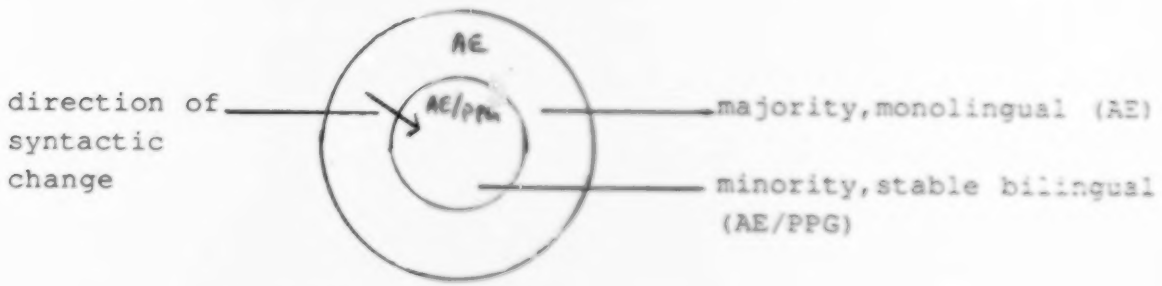
December 28, 1987

fig. 1:
stable bilingualism

--acquisition	(both L1, L2 acquired in childhood)
--prestige	(L1, L2=equally prestigious)
--domains	(well-defined for both L1, L2)

fig. 2:
direction of syntactic change in PPG/AE contact situation



AE=functionally dominant over PPG

fig. 3:
syntactic change in PPG

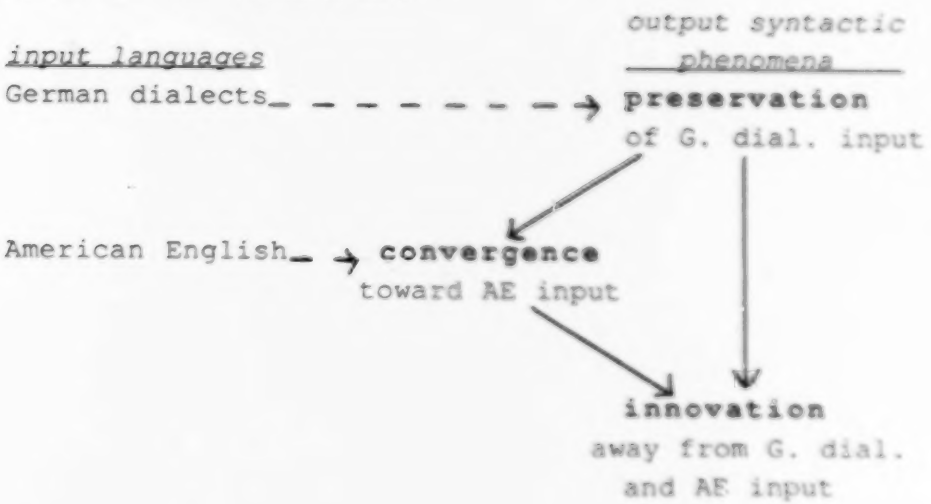


fig. 4:
tense in PPG

high frequency form
(native form of low frequency)
(extinct native form of low frequency)
[expanded form]
innovated form

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